



CALIFORNIA VETERANS BOARD

Meeting Minutes #698
December 7, 2006



Chairman Vernon Chong
Randal Bressette, Vice Chairman
Leo P. Burke, Board Member

Jake I. Alarid, Board Member
Alice Astafan, Board Member
Colin Shadell, Board Member

The California Veterans Board met at the California Veterans Home, Yountville in Yountville, California at 3:30 PM

ROLL CALL

Present: Vernon Chong, Chairman, Randal Bressette, Vice-Chairman, Member, Leo Burke, Member, Colin Shadell, Member, Jake Alarid, Member
Member Alice Astafan joined the meeting at 5:00 PM
Chairman Chong presided

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CLOSED SESSION

A) Independent Counsel

Independent Counsel for the Board was discussed. It was determined that the Board would conduct its own appeal hearings, and that the Board would use the Department's Chief Counsel for advice relative to policy.

OLD BUSINESS

A) Committees: Purpose, areas of interest, operating policies, etc.

This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

B) Board Policies: purpose, how initiated, how developed and approved

This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

C) Board Conduct and Ethics

This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

D) Meeting Schedule for 2007

Member Bressette moved that we change the February 9 meeting in Redding to February 15.

Member Shadell seconded.

Motion approved and carried.

Member Bressette moved to amend the calendar to make the 2007 meetings 2 days (Thursday and Friday). Member Astafan seconded.

Motion approved and carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 5:30 PM



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The California Veterans Board met at the California Veterans Home, Yountville in Yountville, California at 9:00 AM

ROLL CALL

Present: Vernon Chong, Chairman, Randal Bressette, Vice-Chairman, Alice Astafan, Member, Leo Burke, Member, Colin Shadell, Member, Jake Alarid, Member
Chairman Chong presided

OPENING CEREMONIES

A) INVOCATION

B) PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

WELCOMING REMARKS/INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Chong welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting. The Chairman then introduced the members of the Board and provided background on each Board member. Chairman Chong introduced Mr. Thomas Johnson, the Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs.

Secretary Johnson welcomed the group and introduced his staff, Undersecretary Roger Brautigan, Deputy Secretary of Homes Bill Parente, Deputy Secretary, Chief Legal Counsel Rob Wilson, Chief of Communications and Legislation Jerry Jones, Administrator of Yountville Marcella McCormack and Deputy Administrator, Bart Buechner.

Chairman Chong advised that during the Thursday, December 7 Closed Session of the Board, Independent Counsel for the Board was discussed. It was determined that the Board would conduct its own appeal hearings and that the Board would use the Department's Chief Counsel for advice relative to policy.

MINUTES

Executive Officer, Bonnie Kelly

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the minutes of the previous meeting held October 26-27, 2006. Board member Bressette moved to approve October 26-27, 2006 minutes. Board member Astafan seconded.
Motion unanimously approved and carried.

Minutes located at www.cdva.ca.gov/board

PUBLIC COMMENT

Erica Palmer
David Salopek
Ken Croft
Ms. Kennedy
Mr. Remnant
Dave Stevenson
James Mussen
John Kinney

OLD BUSINESS

A) Committees: Purpose, areas of interest, operating policies, etc.

This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

B) Board Policies: purpose, how initiated, how developed and approved

This item will be carried over to the next meeting.

C) Board Conduct and Ethics

Member Bressette moved that we forward this draft to the Policy and Procedures Committee for review prior to returning to the Board for approval. Member Astafan seconded with the stipulation that the issue of criticizing or disparaging remarks by anyone addressing the Board should be added to paragraph B.

Motion unanimously approved and carried.

Member Bressette moved that Member Alarid's draft document of proposed Power and Responsibilities of the California Veterans Board be forwarded to the Policy and Procedures Committee for formatting and returned for presentation at the April Board meeting. Member Alarid seconded.

Motion unanimously approved and carried.

DEPARTMENT FORUM

A. Department Update

- Secretary Johnson updated the group on the GLAVC project noting that the Department has met every Federal and State deadline for public works for the State Home Construction Program, and 100% of the plans were completed and approved by the USDVA on December 4. On December 6, the land was provided to the State of California by the United States Government via Quit Claim Deed of 13.378 acres, and the Governor accepted this land on December 7 in a ceremony which was attended by Board Member Alice Astafan, and a number of Veterans service organizations. The plans have now gone out to bid, and by March the Department will be able to receive those bids and move forward with the next stage, which is the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Federal Government. The week of December 11, the Department will be having constituent meetings and construction meetings, what is called project outreach meetings, in Lancaster, Ventura and Los Angeles, as well as pre-bid walk throughs with the contractors that are interested in bidding on that project. The sharing agreements that are being worked out in concert with the people in West Los Angeles are also going well. Five of them are completed. The key one that is not finalized is the Information Systems. This is an ideal opportunity for the Federal Government to incorporate the Vista System as a prototype into the West Los Angeles Home so that those Veterans can have their records incorporated seamlessly. This is a policy matter that may have to ultimately be made by Secretary Nicholson.

- There's still a problem in the federal government with the State Home Grant Program. The Department sent out a letter on October 6 statewide regarding the Military Construction Military Quality of Life and Veteran's Affairs Appropriation Act of 2007. We need to keep up the pressure on this issue, because it's currently a dead issue that won't be dealt with by the Lame Duck Congress. They have punted it to the new 110th Congress convening in 2007, and it will not be dealt with until sometime in February. It's extremely important that every member of Congress, as well as our two Senators, know that HR 5385 must include \$105 million in the State Home Grant Program, which is what the House has recommended. The Senate has recommended \$85 million. In 2000 there was \$100 million in this program, and two years ago there was \$105 million. Last year, they dropped it to \$85 million despite the fact that there are many more life safety, as well as new homes required for State home Veterans. We're asking everyone to make this a priority. It's time for every Veterans organization and the Board to take leadership in getting behind their congressmen and their senators to support the House version of the Veterans budget signed. If the Senate version is adopted, the Program may not be able to meet its funding commitments and could become a major problem for all state home projects, including those in California. This is being managed statewide with every state on board working towards the same goal.
- The State budget will be presented by the Governor on January 10. There is still a \$5.5 Billion Dollar structural deficit which will weigh heavily on all departments. The Department of Veterans Affairs has escaped the kind of budget cutting drills over the last year that has been necessary and has affected other departments. We believe we will be spared again from these drills, but it does impinge on our ability to do more or add to the budget that we have. We do feel that we will be very well received. The major concern going forward is the salary issue, which we are working hard on. A ruling by Judge Henderson of the U.S. District Court for Northern California relative to a recommendation by the Federal Receiver, Bob Sillen who has been appointed to oversee the prison healthcare system. His charge was to ensure that the prison healthcare system met all of the Federal and legal requirements for providing healthcare to prisoners. In order to do that, they had to have nurses, doctors, technicians that were sufficient to provide that healthcare. In some instances they had vacancy rates of 50% in some categories of professionals, so the Judge accepted the recommendation from Mr. Sillen regarding salaries. He requested, and received approval, to increase the salaries by 47%, which would mean that the RN's in the Bay Area would be maximized at \$107,868. The maximum rate for an RN in Barstow, including the R&R as of January when they will receive an increase, is \$73,128. Their salary is almost 50% more at the maximum than the maximum at the Veteran's home. There's a similar situation with Pharmacists. The Judge awarded an increase of 64% for Pharmacists, and 28% for the Clinical Dietitian. We already have a 31% vacancy rate for RN's at Yountville, a 40% vacancy rate for Pharmacists, and 17% vacancy rate for Dietitians. An increase of 47%, 65% and 28% over our existing salaries will create an enormous problem.

On the plus side, there will be a lot of money in the Department's budget for information technology refreshing of our system and services so that the IT staff will have a lot of tools once the budget goes through this year. The Department has been behind in upgrading the IT systems. The Department is currently down from four to one person in the Budget Office and is recruiting for a Chief Budget Officer and two more Analysts.

- Regarding the Cal Vet Loan Program, three states, Wisconsin, Oregon and Alaska, have introduced separate legislation without discussing it with California. What was passed last year in the Tax Reconciliation Act allowed them to continue with their program until a sunset of 2010 with a smaller cap, but it eliminated the 1977 date. California did not get included

because the cap was too small. Our focus this year is to get rid of the 1977 date, keep the same cap of the \$340,000,000 and give it a 6% escalator.

- During the Board meeting at Chula Vista, the San Diego Office was discussed. The Department is still working with General Services on finding an acceptable location. The Department will also be doing monthly visits by our Headquarters staff to the Regional Offices and working more closely with them.
- Bond rates have become even more favorable in the past week, and the Department may be putting an additional \$68,000,000 back in the program, added to the almost \$500,000,000 of combination Revenue and General Obligation Bonds sold. The Department is also recruiting for a Chief of Bond Finance and currently has two good candidates.
- Regarding Veterans Services, Jack Kirwin is involved in a lot of education outreach activities and is working with the EDD. Next year they will have ten job fairs and they are currently outlining dates and locations. He's working on the Governor's Task Force on troop education to get more of our active military involved in educational opportunities and get the schools more aligned together in how they will take care of our Veterans, and the kind of best practices that they can share regarding getting our Veterans in programs where there are preferences or benefits that they can avail themselves of. The Labor Department has now involved us in the awarding of grants to the providers of educational outreach to homeless Veterans. Although the government's discretionary funds have diminished at the federal level, they have maintained the amount they are giving to Veterans organizations, making it one of their priorities.
- Returning Veterans have not been signing up for health care benefits, which is a problem because the allocation of dollars is based on numbers. As the number of Veterans is diminishing in California, we need to focus on encouraging our Veterans to sign up for VA healthcare. The Department will also be focusing on niches to find those areas in California where we need to serve all Veterans.
- There's currently an opportunity to name one of the Virginia class submarines, and we're suggesting the U.S.S. California. The Department is pushing for this and has put the word out and encouraged everyone to send a letter to Secretary of Navy, Don Winter to support this.
- Undersecretary Roger Brautigan announced that for the first time, Finance is going to give the Department an equipment replacement fund on an annual basis so that equipment at the Homes can be replaced over time with gradual cost of living increases programmed in. The Department is aware of the delays in some of the construction issues, especially in Yountville, but they are beyond the Department's control. Secretary Johnson has instituted quarterly updates, which may become monthly, with the Department of General Services to review the status of all of these projects and push for their completion. The Department has been given approval to renovate the Member Services Building at Yountville and bids are currently open for an architect firm to begin the design work. Once the firm has been selected, input will be allowed from the residents of Yountville regarding the design of the building.

C. Significant Legal Matters

NEW BUSINESS

A) Committee Reports

The Administrative Committee is currently reviewing policies to see if they need updating.

The Policy and Procedures Committee is in the process of reviewing all of the policies of the Board. The divisions of the Department will be submitting revisions that pertain to their unit.

The Communications Committee noted that on December 6, the second California Veterans Board newsletter was published and sent out.

The Homes Committee will be outlining the goals and charter of the Committee. They will be monitoring the morale and welfare of the members of all Veterans homes, and determining a method for grievances that have not been addressed by the Administration to be forwarded to the Board for review.

Bill Parente discussed a new policy that has been proposed to address non-Veteran spouses to allow them to remain in the Home. The Home's Committee has approved the draft policy and it will now be referred to the Policy and Procedures Committee for their review.

The Veterans Services Committee had nothing to report at this time.

The Legislative Committee reported that, unfortunately, many of the newly elected Legislators are not Veterans. The Committee will endeavor to meet in January with the staffs of the Senate and Assembly Veterans Affairs Committees, as well as their Chairmen to let them know who the California Veterans Board is, what our role is in serving California's Veterans and how we can work with the Legislature, the Governor and the Secretary.

B) Board Goals and Objectives for 2007

Member Bressette moved to accept the goals and objectives as outlined in the draft for the calendar year 2007. Member Shadell seconded the motion. Chairman Chong noted that some of the dates will need to be revised.

Motion was approved and carried.

C) Board Budget

Member Bressette reaffirmed that we should continue to include the budget spreadsheet as a part of the reports sent to the Board.

D) Term Limit for Chairperson

The Board discussed what the term of the Board Chairperson should be. Member Astafan suggested that Item D and E be rephrased to read review Board organization annually and write a policy around that to include whether we change leadership of officers and committees. Member Bressette moved to refer this matter and the Reorganization of the Board to the Policy and Procedures Committee for further discussion and recommendation to the Board at the February meeting. Member Astafan seconded. Motion was approved and carried.

Member Bressette moved to make the Chairperson of the Board a 2 year term, eligible for re-election. Member Astafan seconded.

Motion was approved and carried with one dissenting vote.

E) Reorganization of Board

To be combined with Item D.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

No legislative issues were discussed.

COMMENTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

Member Alarid requested that the Board be informed whenever problems or issues of concern occur at the Homes.

Member Alarid is on a committee with AT&T and advised that they are interested in visiting the Homes early next year to see how they can contribute in terms of philanthropy. He feels that there are many untapped corporate sources that would also be able to contribute financially to the Homes and we should endeavor to encourage these.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 11:45 AM.